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Application Number. : 09/992,392  
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Draft of Proposed Amendments for Claims 1, 3, 9, 16, 18, and 25 are for Discussion Purposes Only

1. (Currently Amended) A slot machine comprising:  
a plurality of reels, each of the reels comprising a reel strip bearing a plurality of different discrete symbols and a continuous graphical element extending between adjacent ones of the discrete symbols such that the discrete symbols are thematically unified by the graphical element;  
a processor operable to rotate the reels and stop the reels to place the discrete symbols on the reels in visual association with a display area, and to award a base game payout responsive to an alignment of a plurality of discrete symbols associated with a winning combination along a selected payline,  
wherein at least one of said reels comprises a video reel and wherein said processor is operable to, for said at least one of said reels, move a selected one of said discrete symbols relative to said continuous graphical element and determine an award, said award being related to a degree of said movement and being independent of any payline.
  
3. (Currently Amended) The slot machine of claim 1, ~~wherein at least one of said reels comprises a video reel and wherein said processor is operable to, for said at least one of said reels, move a selected one of said discrete symbols relative to said continuous graphical element~~  
wherein said processor is operable to, for said at least one of said reels, move the selected one of said discrete symbols relative to said continuous graphical element and determine, during for a bonus game, an award being related to a degree of said movement and being independent of any payline.

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9. (Currently Amended) A slot machine comprising:

a plurality of reels, each of the reels comprising a reel strip bearing a plurality of discrete symbol positions and a continuous graphical element extending between adjacent ones of the discrete symbol positions such that the discrete symbol positions are thematically unified by the graphical element, each of the reel strips also bearing a discrete symbol in at least one of said discrete symbol positions; and

a processor programmed to award a base game payout responsive to an alignment of a plurality of different discrete symbols associated with a winning combination along a selected payline,

wherein at least one of said reels comprises a video reel and wherein said processor is programmed to, for said at least one of said reels, move a selected one of said discrete symbols relative to said continuous graphical element during a bonus game, an award being related to a degree of said movement and independent of any payline.

16. (Cancelled).

18. (Currently Amended) A method of conducting a slot game on a slot machine controlled by a processor, comprising:

receiving a wager from a player; and

rotating a plurality of reels, at least one of the reels comprising a video reel, each of the reels comprising a reel strip bearing a plurality of different discrete symbols and a continuous graphical element extending between adjacent ones of the discrete symbols such that the discrete symbols are thematically unified by the graphical element;

stopping the reels to place a portion of each reel in visual association with a display area;

and

providing a payout responsive to an alignment of a winning combination of discrete symbols along a payline in said display area;

moving a selected one of said discrete symbols relative to said continuous graphical element; and

providing an award related to a degree of said movement and being independent of any payline.

25. (Currently Amended) A method of conducting a slot game on a slot machine controlled by a processor, comprising:

receiving a wager from a player;

rotating a video reel, the video reel bearing a plurality of discrete symbol positions and a continuous graphical element extending between adjacent ones of the discrete symbol positions such that the discrete symbol positions are thematically unified by the graphical element;

moving a discrete symbol between the adjacent ones of the discrete symbol positions as the video reel is rotated; and

determining a payout based on the a degree of movement of the discrete symbol between the adjacent ones of the discrete symbol positions as the video reel is rotated, said act of determining being independent of any selected pay line.